

Forepier Stop

#2 History Afloat

Welcome to the historic ships of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. These ships tell stories of past economies, technologies, and life at sea that are hard for most people today to imagine. You are invited to walk down Hyde Street Pier and ponder what California and San Francisco were like before the modern day. Each ship will offer you unique and surprising stories. Together, they offer undeniable proof of the importance of ships in the history of California and the west coast of the United States.

Consider the ferryboat *Eureka* for example. One of her surprising stories is how she survived through time to become the largest floating wooden object in the world today.

These ships also tell how long-lived commercial sailing vessels were. For example, the schooner *C.A. Thayer*, built in 1895, completed her last commercial voyage in 1950. In doing so, she was the last large sailing vessel on the west coast in commercial operation.

The ocean tug *Hercules* and scow schooner *Alma* reveal the economic importance of both coastal and river waterways before the development of modern highway systems. The *Hercules* was an ocean tug that sailed along west coast towing things such as lumber and barges of petroleum, which were difficult and overly expensive to transport on land. The *Alma* did a similar job, carrying a variety of goods, by sailing along rivers that connected San Francisco to numerous inland communities.

And the *Balclutha* amazingly tells of people and their lives while at sea. In going into her crew's quarters you may be shocked at the ruggedness of their living conditions compared to the Captain's luxuriously appointed quarters. And you'll also learn about the life of the captain's family who often accompanied him on long voyages. Imagine what it was like for the two known women who gave birth during their voyage.

Each individual ship has important historical significance. But as a collection they reveal that the history of California and the United States West Coast is, to a great extent, tied to its waterways and the ships sailed that them.